Local Programs Sept. 20-26

TV GUIDE

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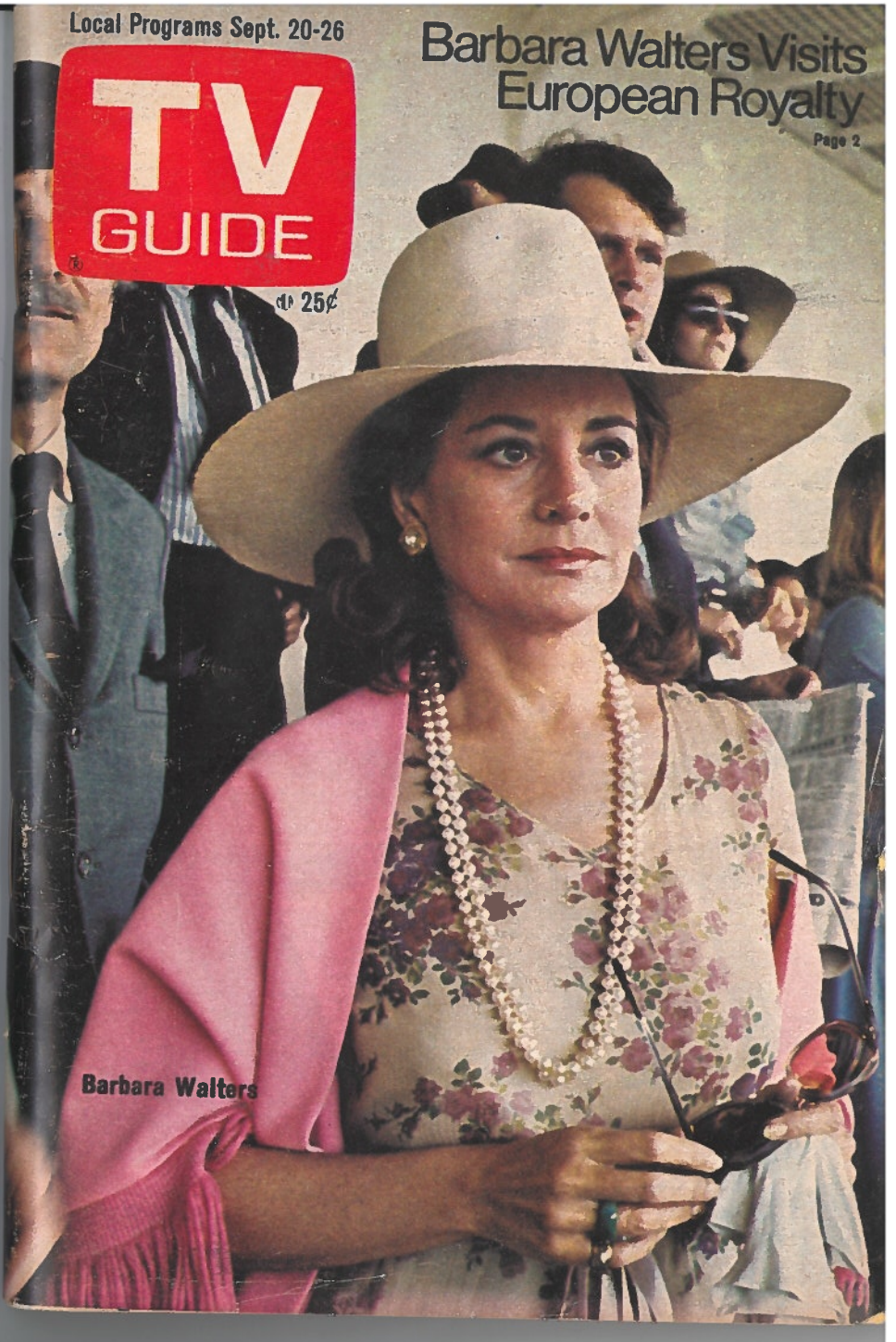
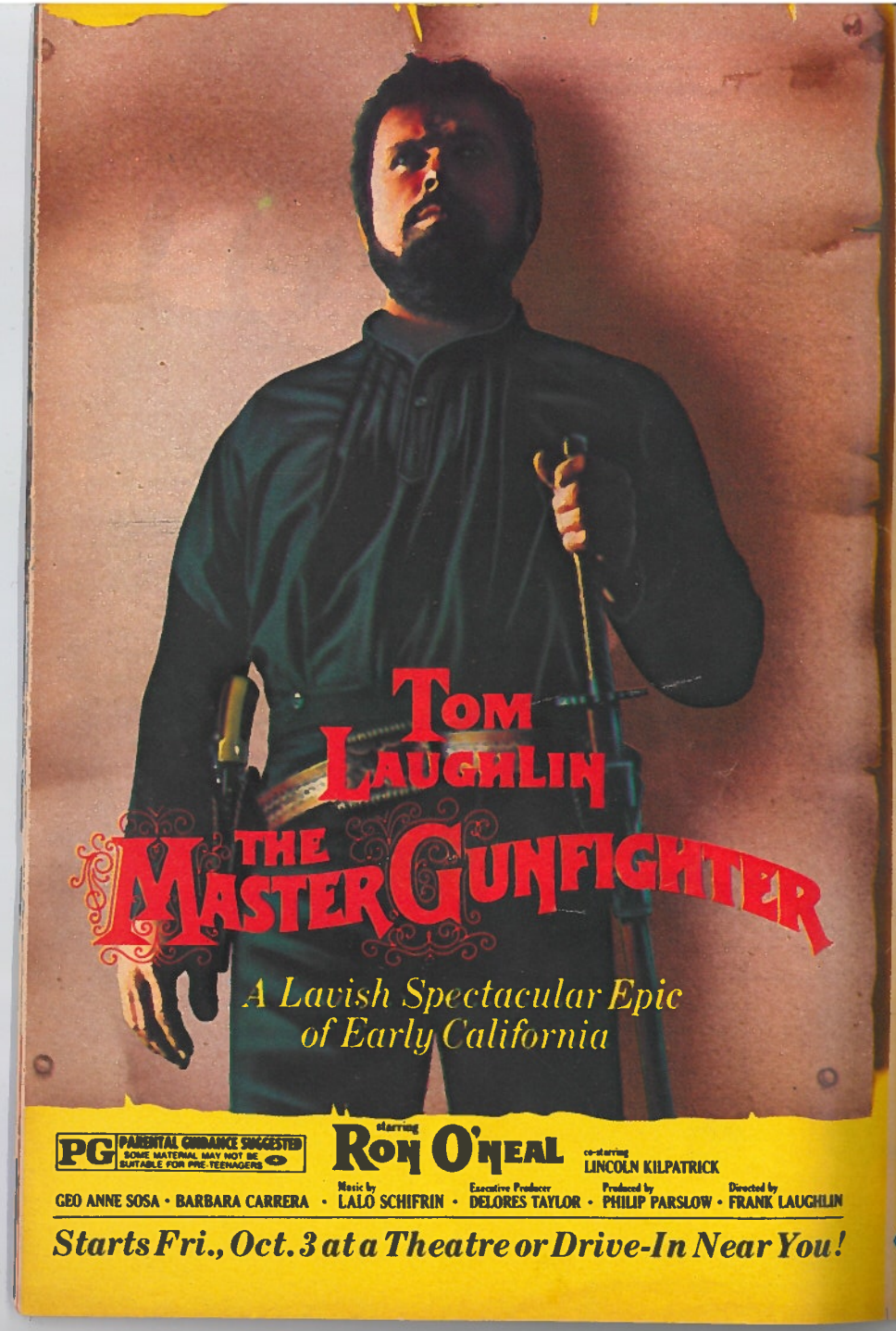
Barbara Walters Visits European Royalty

Page 2



Barbara Walters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CBS and Hunters Exchange Fire Over Documentary

"The Guns of Autumn", CBS News' fusillade aimed at the American hunter, has produced a cross fire of controversy off screen.

Prior to the Sept. 5 broadcast of the documentary about hunting, six advertisers canceled their commercials, after numerous calls from gun and hunting groups. Only one advertiser remained, leaving a single commercial minute sold out of nine available.

Bill Leonard, CBS News senior vice president, called the action by the gun groups "the most naked kind of pressure by a pressure group." CBS will air its own documentary account of the controversy, "Echoes of the Guns of Autumn," Sept. 28. Among the advertisers that withdrew were: Datsun, Aqua Tec (makers of dental appliances) and Lennox Industries (heating and air conditioning units). Block Drug was the show's sole advertiser, with two 30-second spots.

The flap over the show flared this summer after TV GUIDE reported that "Guns" would be "50 per cent from the animal's point of view." Soon, CBS began receiving complaints from gun groups, with most of the objections centering on possible biased reportage. A current news item in The American Rifleman, the magazine of the National Rifle Association, suggested that readers contact the FCC "if in your opinion the program misrepresents facts." The editorial noted "CBS News has an established reputation for attacking firearms ownership."

Tom Hodges, an NRA spokesman, said he phoned advertisers before air time because "Guns" was "designed to show the American hunter as a slob." Hodges, who previewed the show on closed circuit, stressed that "At no time did we try to intimidate. There were no threats, veiled or otherwise." Advertisers agree.

Datsun's spokesman said the company appreciated the gun groups' activity: "We weren't aware the show was controversial. A fairly large amount of our sales are pickup trucks bought by guys who work for a living. If they are hunters, it might offend them."

An Aqua Tec spokeswoman said the firm wanted to be "neutral" on controversial issues; otherwise "it might reflect on our products." At Lennox, a spokesman said his bosses may have "knuckled under. Everybody reacts to public feelings. We aren't interested in being condemned by hunters."

Block Drug's chairman, Leonard Block, said he rejected withdrawal because cancellation would mean that the company "was attempting to censor a major news medium." He continued: "Block believes censorship by advertisers or any group is improper and contrary to fundamental American traditions."

AM America, which tried to offer viewers snap, crackle and pop, has flopped. ABC will introduce a new show Oct. 27. Fred Silverman, head of ABC Entertainment, announced the decision to the affiliates via closed circuit. An industry source said he expects the show to have a new name, new format and different personnel.

—Frank Sean Swertlow

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